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THE VOLUNTEER'S DUTY.

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A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE VOLUNTEERS STATIONED AT
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BY

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SERMON.

"Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the King of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him; with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles."—[II. Chron. xxxii. 7, 8.]

MY FRIENDS,—Of all means of civilization, the roughest and most cruel, yet often the most rapid and efficient, is grim and terrible war. Yes, war, the destroyer of the nations and the desolater of the earth, is often the forerunner of changes the most beneficent—clearing away the obstacles in the path of human advancement, exalting the valleys, and causing the hills to be brought low to prepare a highway for the coming of the Lord.

We do not forget for an instant, the fearful atrocities of war, its horrors and its crimes; nor do we excuse the wickedness of those who begin it, lightly for their own bad ends. But what man aims at is one thing; what God designs is another. He who uses the lightning and the tempest as His ministers may accomplish His will even by this awful explosion of human anger. He can put bounds to the rage of man as to the fury of the elements; and under His control that which seems to work only havoc and ruin is often made to purify while it desolates, and renew while it destroys.

Thus war, although in itself an evil, often tends to quicken the life of humanity. By nature man is sunk in sloth and brutishness. Before he can accomplish anything great, he must be roused from this lethargy. This is most readily done by the strong excitement of the passions. Then in-

tensity of feeling calls out the strength of the human will. By nations, as by individuals, the things which the world counts great—those which live in history—are wrought under the stimulus of some over-mastering passion, fear or ambition, the love of country or of liberty. Now, war is the great exciter of human passion. It is, in consequence, a powerful stimulant of human energy and human effort. It rouses to great efforts and great sacrifices. It teaches the necessity of combined action by the force of common danger. By it a people are compacted and made a nation. Besides, the sufferings which are in every case, to a greater or less extent, its concomitants, enforce lessons of self-sacrifice, courage, heroism, patience and endurance; lessons which do not serve their end, except in leaving—what they are well fitted to do—a powerful impress for good on the national character.

Hence, wherever war goes, with all its calamities, it carries also blessings in its train. We do not say, with some cold-blooded philosophers, that war is the *great civilizer*; but we do say that it is often a powerful means of civilization. The conquests of Rome were conquests of civilization. Rashly as that mighty people acted—fast and far as they went, they built those great highways, portions of which remain to this day, which, from distant provinces, converged to the imperial city, and along which at once marched Roman leaders and Roman law. They ruled the nations with an iron hand; but even by doing so, by despotic and cruel force, they established order, which is the foundation stone in any enduring structure of society, and taught a better civilization than the barbarians ever knew.

And as war is the efficient instrument of imposing social order on savage tribes, so it is the most direct means of reorganizing society. In proof of this, look at that great convulsion known as the French Revolution, which desolated Europe, sweeping from the Baltic to the Adriatic, and from Spain to Russia. It was like a furious storm let loose to ravage the earth. Infinite suffering was entailed by it on that generation. It lasted twenty-four years. But in that time it cleared away many of the wrongs and abuses of centuries. It taught the great to

respect the rights, by making them dread the power, of the poor. It was a fiery gospel of liberty, equality, and fraternity sent among the nations. After the storm had swept over the continent, Europe breathed a purer air, and the present generation are better on account of the sufferings of their fathers.

In short, there is not a nation in the world that has risen to power and greatness which has not required some life and death struggle to call out its manhood and its strength; to teach it courage and self-respect; to consolidate it and give it a name and a place in the earth.—The Kingdom of Prussia was hardly known as a power until the wars of Frederick the Great. Holland, away in a corner of the continent of Europe, would never have secured recognition for the development given to its strength and character by a long course of war. Had it remained untroubled, Spain might indeed have enjoyed a degree of material prosperity—the rich burghers of Amsterdam might have kept their houses and lands and lived in peace, but the spirit of the nation would have remained abject as of a people of slaves. But when the united provinces joined to resist subjugation by Spain, then the sturdy Dutch stood up like men, and every onset of the invader, like a blast of the north wind beating against their rugged breasts, only evoked a stronger spirit of resistance. This struggle lasted thirty years, and still the war went on. Children who were in their cradles, nay, those who were not yet born, grew up to manhood, and took the place of those who had fallen in the ranks, and died there also. But what was the result? The land was laid desolate, cities were subjected to cruel sieges, and the population fearfully wasted by famine and slaughter, but the remnant became the fathers of a mighty race. That long struggle had left its impress, not only upon the face of the country, not only in devastated fields and burnt cities, but upon the character of the people. It made them brave, manly and self-reliant—fit to be the founders of an empire. Then Holland indeed arose, like Venice, out of the sea, and became a power among the nations. That long war is still looked upon as the grandest event in its history, and the effect of it on the national character remains to this day.

Coming nearer home we notice, in illustration of our theory, the result of the four years' struggle in which our neighbors across the line have been engaged. Begun by them for a selfish purpose, viz., that of forcing back into the Union the revolting States, it has ended, under the providence of God, in the abolition of slavery—a system which, wherever, or in whatever mode it is carried on, is a curse to man, and an insult to heaven.—Now, of America, as of England, it may be said that a slave has but to breathe its air to be free, and were it not for one circumstance, we might predicate of it, what history and observation would justify us in doing, a long course of happiness and prosperity. That circumstance is that since the adjustment of its own quarrel, it has allowed, and is still allowing, thousands upon thousands of its adopted sons—lawless conspirators—to plot and scheme, for what, forsooth, they are pleased to call the liberating of their fatherland; and to threaten, in the prosecution of their plan, an attack on a country which has not afforded them the smallest provocation,—I mean this Canada of ours.

Without attempting to surmise, what to the American Government might be the result of its allowing such an attack to be made unchecked, (as the cases just alluded to, in which war was seen to lead to ultimate good, bear no analogy), I proceed, pursuing a different train of thought, to state, what under the circumstances appears to me to be our duty, namely, to be prepared for defence, to fight, as the ancients expressed it, *pro aris et focis*—for our hearths and homes. And if ever, in reference to any cause, we would be warranted in drawing comfort from the words of the text,—“Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the King of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him; with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles for us.”—that cause would be ours, for murder and pillage—deeds condemned as well by God as by honest men of every age and land—are the crimes which we would be called upon to avert.

Hezekiah's conduct, as described in the chapter from

which our text is taken, in the prospect of a siege, is deserving of our attentive consideration. In the hour of alarm and danger, he lifted up his eyes unto the hills whence came his help. He spread his case before God, to whose hands he entrusted his safety, and having received through the inspired prophet Isaiah an explicit assurance of preservation from the invading enemy, he not only kept himself in perfect peace, his heart being stayed on the Lord, but he encouraged his people to place their confidence in the same Almighty Guardian. And yet though thus assured, he displayed the most active, unremitting energy in the use of every means calculated to weaken his assailants and strengthen the defence of his capitol. In like manner, while we trust in God for our preservation and safety, we must, in seasons of danger, use all the means which our experience or sagacity can suggest: otherwise we tempt Him, and have no right to look for His assistance and blessing. The call issued by the Governor General of this Province, under existing circumstances, indicated an appreciation on his part, and on the part of his counsellors, of the duty to which I have alluded. And what shall I say less of the noble response made, and made with alacrity, by the volunteers of our country. In less than twenty-four hours from the issuing of the order—to the credit of their patriotism be it said—the ten thousand required were under arms and at their different posts.

While congratulating you now before me as among that number, permit me, in giving you a few words of advice, to observe—

1.—That success in every department of duty depends upon unity of purpose and concentrated action. Every effective scheme of military tactics has been so framed as to combine the energies of those carrying it out, and bring them to bear on one point. Hence the various gradations of rank, and the peculiar duties belonging to each, yet all tending to the accomplishment of one ultimate object. The distinction of rank, strictly speaking, is an appointment of God, wisely designed for drawing forth and cultivating the latent virtues of the heart, and consolidating the framework of society by reciprocal acts of benevolence and skill. The discipline and efficiency of

an army particularly require that these distinctions be strictly observed. Whatever, therefore, be your respective stations, strive to know and faithfully to fulfil their duties, alike from a sense of honor, from a regard to the public service, and from obedience to the will of God.

2.—That the same just conception of duty, while it will unite you together as one man, in all that relates to the honor and efficiency of the service, should also lead you to take a deep interest in the welfare of every individual of the corps to which you belong. You represent the leading religious sects,—Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Methodist—and to their honor be it said—Roman Catholic. In the exercise of generous and Christian feeling, carefully avoid everything that would interrupt the harmony or disturb the peace which should prevail among you. Act towards each other in the spirit of the Apostolic injunction,—“Be kindly affectioned one toward another, in brotherly love and honor, preferring one another.”

3.—That in the discharge of public and relative duty, you should not forget the duty which—if it may be so expressed—you owe more immediately to yourselves. “Flee youthful lusts which war against the soul. Take not the name of the Lord your God in vain. Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess.” Here lies the root of almost all the evils which beset the soldier’s life. Indulging in the vice of drunkenness, he loses the confidence and esteem of his officers; he loses self-respect; he disgraces his profession; he offends his God. Count, then, I would earnestly beseech you, the cost of the unhallowed pleasures of intoxication before you surrender yourselves to their power. Fortify yourselves against this vice by every lesson which your experience of its ruinous issue may bring before you—by every consideration which sound reason may suggest to your minds—and above all, by supplicating the grace of God. In short, to secure your perfect safety, not only from this, but from moral evil of every kind, and “to have the Lord ever on your side,” walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called, like Joshua and Caleb, those ancient warriors, of whom, it is said, they wholly followed the Lord. Live as good soldiers of the cross. Hesitate not to endure the reproach

of Christ. Strive to be as devoted to your heavenly as to your earthly sovereign. Many noble examples for your guidance, occurring in our own day, are upon record. Several of those who fell on Cawnpore's bloody plain were heard in the struggles of death uttering such passages as these, which plainly indicated their mode of life: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. As thy day is so shall thy strength be. Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his trust." Such soldiers as these could ill be spared; but their death, though loss to us, was gain to them. Their course is finished—their battle fought—their victory won; and now the wreath, the laurel, and the green palm of glory are theirs. Now it is theirs to tread the streets of the New Jerusalem;

"And not a wave of trouble rolls
Across their peaceful breasts."

But these remarks, while applying to the rank and file, are intended equally to apply to those of you in command. Seek, then, to profit by the lesson which they are calculated to convey. For your special guidance and encouragement also, there are examples to which, without travelling far in search of them, I might point. If the heart of British Americans ever beat with feelings of gratitude or joy, it is at the mention of the name of the brave and gallant General Wolfe. On the Plains of Abraham, while in battle fighting to secure the privileges which we possess, he received the wound from which he died. Tradition and history have it that while he lay bleeding on the field of battle, the cry, "they run!" arose along the line. As he was raised from the ground, he asked, "who run?" "The French," was the reply. He seemed to feel satisfied; he had accomplished the purpose for which he had been sent. "The French—(then he added)—I die happy," and falling down, he instantly expired.

Or, I might speak of General Brock, but it is unnecessary, as the circumstances of his glorious fall and death, occurring within the memory of many living at the present time, are well known. To those who know them not, the splendid monument on the Heights of Queenstown, red-

dened with the hero's blood, erected as a spontaneous free will offering by the people of Canada, can pathetically tell the tale.

Or, I might go to another land and picture to you a grey-headed old chief, with keen eye and stern countenance, rushing at the head of a handful of men from one town to another, to the relief of his beleaguered countrymen, whose lives were in jeopardy—undeterred by the many obstacles that surrounded him, the harassing attacks of the enemy, the want of sustenance and rest, and the broiling heat of a tropical sun. Though pestilence and the leaden hail thin the ranks of the redoubtable phalanx, still their leader never falters. Like Elisha, when he sees himself compassed about with horses and chariots, no panic seizes him. He stays himself upon God; and in the words of my text, he exclaims,—“Be strong and courageous; more are they that be with us than with them; with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles for us.” No sooner is one blow dealt by him than it is followed up by another. Thereby he strikes consternation and terror into the hearts of the enemy, and imparts hope to the oppressed. “Man is immortal till his work is done,” was the expressive saying of Napoleon III; and it was not till he had fulfilled his mission, by relieving the residency of Lucknow, that Havelock sank into his rest. No higher wish can I express for your welfare than that, after having faithfully served your day and generation, when you come to die, whether amid the din of the battle-field, or the quiet peace of home, you may be enabled to speak in the strain of this gallant man, as he whispered to his son bending to receive his last sigh,—“For forty years I have been preparing for this day; death is to me a blessing.”

In conclusion, while I put forward the conduct of these men as worthy of your imitation, I would not that we should boast too much of the prowess of our soldiers, or the skill and strategy of our generals; but remember that when the hour of trial comes, (and God grant that it may be far away) if we would really wish to secure success, and in the midst of danger to be safe, we must so act as to have the God of battles on our side. To nations, as to individuals,

He ever vouchsafes His assistance, if, when engaged in a right cause, they look to Him in faith. Who of our soldiers and commanders in the history of the past, let me ask, in proof of this, have most prevailed, and not only so, but after death, have lived most gratefully in the affections of their countrymen? Those, must be the reply, who acted on the principle to which I have alluded—the principle deduced from my text. Why is it that British statesmen, for high-minded integrity and far-seeing judgment, stand unequalled? Because they seek that wisdom which is from above. Why is it that England has long occupied, and occupies still, the proudest position among the nations; that though foes have kindled fires around her with revenge and implacable hatred, like the bush that Moses saw, she is not consumed, but still flourishes and grows? It is because she has believed, and believes still, that it is righteousness and righteousness alone that exalteth a nation. Why is it that our noble Queen is so loved and honored, that to save her from insult or injury, more than three-fourths of her subjects would lay down their lives? It is because she lives in the fear of God and makes herself a partaker alike of her people's joys and sorrows, and takes the deepest interest in them all, from the statesman who directs the affairs of the realm down to the beggared orphan boy who shivers in the winter's cold. God bless the Queen! Long live Victoria! Under her sway, in this country—which is dear to some of those here present as the land of their birth, to others as the land of their adoption, to all of us as our home—we are allowed to worship God, as our Bible directs, and our consciences approve, none daring to make us afraid; we derive the benefit of equitable laws, and live in peace and quiet, on friendly terms with one another, and with kindly feelings to other nations, except in so far as they may attempt to take advantage of us or deprive us of our rights. Far distant, then, be the day when she shall cease to be our sovereign, and we cease to be under that form of government which, in the providence of God, has secured for us so many blessings in the times that are past. Volunteers! we look to you to preserve the existing connection upon which so

much depends, and we feel confident we shall not look in vain. We are not, however, so free from anxiety as to whether our statesmen and those in the seats of authority fully apprehend the condition of a true national greatness, and are prepared, in the noblest sense, to do their part in raising this country to that point of elevation which it ought to be the ambition of every country to seek to attain. On this subject they, and all of us, need line upon line, and precept upon precept.—Money, which is freely spent in the promotion of other schemes, should also be spent with unprecedented generosity, in planting over the whole land the institutions of religion and education. As our line of domain extends, and we hope it soon will, from Lake Superior to the sea, the conservative influence of Christianity should extend along with it—even that Christianity which is from above, and which not only restores men to peace and reconciles them with their God, but confers so many and signal benefits wherever its elevating and purifying tendencies are felt.—“Then shall the earth yield her increase, and God, even our God, shall bless us.”